

# **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION EVALUATION**

**FINAL REPORT  
MARCH, 2000**

**SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION**



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# Section I: Background and Project Description

## ***Introduction***

Seattle is blessed with great natural beauty, but it is the active involvement of the people of Seattle in their community that make it one of the most livable cities in the world. How citizens are involved in local government and other community institutions has changed over time, but Seattlites have always understood and valued citizen participation.

This evaluation of one aspect of citizen participation analyzes geographically based City-initiated and supported citizen participation in order to identify basic characteristics of effective citizen participation and to make recommendations to the City regarding future City support of citizen participation. The evaluation evolved in part out of interest and concern about assuring effective stewardship of the 38 neighborhood plans developed over the past four years.

It is recognized that this focus is a limited one and that there are many other ways in which citizens participate in both neighborhood and citywide grass roots organizations as well as City sponsored public involvement that focus on citywide issues or specific projects.

## ***Background***

*Seattle citizens have a long history of civic involvement.*

As far back as the early 1920's people began meeting in various field houses – as Community Centers were called back then – to help the park staff plan activities. It was during this time also that citizens established neighborhood organizations to help nurture and preserve their neighborhoods.

During the past three decades, the City has increasingly engaged citizens in planning for neighborhoods, recreation centers and activities, and public safety. With the creation of the Office of Neighborhoods in 1988, the City of Seattle made a commitment to provide regular mechanisms for neighborhoods communicate with one another and the City, to have input to City processes and to initiate self-help projects.

After adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 1994, Seattle and its citizens embarked on one of the most ambitious citizen-based neighborhood planning projects in America. Thirty-eight neighborhoods were funded to organize, plan and make recommendations to the City for their future.

Citizens and local government officials in Seattle continue to find ways to broaden and improve the effectiveness of citizen participation through technology as well as traditional meetings and processes. Elected officials have made increasingly clear their commitment to making government accessible to

its citizens; to create and maintain a collaborative relationship between members of the community and its local government. Seattle's commitment to citizen participation is exemplary and is used by many other communities as a model for both publicly sponsored and grass roots citizen participation.

❑ **Changes in citizen participation and access to local government in the past 10 years.**

The last ten years have seen continuing changes in the way people interact with those who provide services or govern their communities. For example, today people make an effort to learn about health care and question physicians closely about medical options before making health care choices. As part of this trend, citizens are increasingly interested in taking a more hands-on approach to their government. Although it is difficult for a large city government to listen and respond to all individuals, in the past ten years the City of Seattle has made significant efforts to communicate with and involve citizens in decisions that affect them.

*Citizens are increasingly interested in taking a more hands-on approach to their government.*

In Seattle, this era of more intentional involvement of citizens in local government was strengthened in the late 1980's with a study and set of recommendations by the Planning Commission on ways to improve the City's relationship with neighborhoods. In 1988, Council passed Resolution 27709 which established the Neighborhood Planning and Assistance Program, created 13 District Councils and a City Neighborhood Council, and initiated the Neighborhood Matching Fund. These three actions fostered more formal communication between the City and neighborhoods, involved neighborhoods in City budget processes, and gave citizens the opportunity to initiate their own projects.

The City also increased support to citizen groups during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Increased public interest in environmental issues and City responsibilities for water quality led to the formation of citizen-driven Watershed Management Committees. Citizen concerns about police responses to crime led to the formation of Precinct Advisory Councils, the strengthening of Crime Prevention Councils and expansion of neighborhood and business block watch programs. Expansion of recreation facilities and programs led to the development of Recreation Advisory Councils that take responsibility for programming for Parks Department Recreation Centers.

*In the past ten years the City of Seattle has made significant investments in citizen participation programs.*

In the past decade, many City departments began to take a closer look at their public involvement processes. In 1994, for example, the Parks Department was reorganized on a geographically based division system, in order to create better connections to local communities. The following year, a committee of citizens and Parks Department staff wrote *Communities in Motion* in order to update and strengthen the relationship between the Department of Parks and Recreation and its citizen-based Recreation Center Advisory Councils.

Over the past five years, there has been further expansion of the ways citizens can interact with elected officials, particularly through town hall meetings, Council meetings in neighborhoods, public access networks and e-mail. An excellent Seattle City web site provides e-mail contact information for all elected officials and City departments. The Mayor and some Council members publish regular e-mail newsletters. The Mayor is regularly heard on the radio answering call-in questions and has held community meetings on key issues. The City also works with the *Seattle Times* on Front-Porch Forum discussions, and roundtables brown bag lunches are held by City officials to discuss important City decisions and gather information from citizens on key issues.

Finally, when the City adopted the Comprehensive Plan in 1994, it made a significant commitment to citizen involvement with the passage of Resolution 29015, establishing the Neighborhood Planning Program. Citizens in areas expected to take growth under the Comp Plan were encouraged to create their own plans to manage future growth with funding support from the City.

The neighborhood planning process brought together long-time citizen activists and people who had not been active in civic life before. A total of over 16,000 people were involved in neighborhood planning. As the end of 1999 approaches, all 38 neighborhood plans have been completed and the City Council has approved most Adoption/Approval matrices, the documents that form the work plan for implementing neighborhood plans. The neighborhoods and the City are now developing implementation processes, including neighborhood plan stewardship groups.

*The report analyzes how people participate and how the City can encourage people to participate more effectively.*

#### ❑ **What motivated this report**

As the City has initiated and sponsored more citizen participation efforts in Seattle, community members and City staff and officials have grappled with the complexities of effective citizen participation, especially when it is initiated to involve citizens in government planning and policymaking. Some City sponsored citizen participation efforts and advisory groups have been very effective, while others have not been perceived as accountable to the groups they represent, and some have struggled to overcome barriers within the City to accomplish their roles.

When the City initiates and supports citizen participation efforts, it must ensure it is truly inclusive, that citizens have a real opportunity to be heard and to influence City processes and projects. The City is also faced with the challenge of how to “change the way the City does business” -- to make government more accessible and open to all citizens, to effectively use City-initiated citizen participation in ways that accomplish broad citywide goals and needs.

With the neighborhood planning process nearing completion, the City Council and Executive have recognized the need maintain the viability and involvement of stewardship groups to help implement the 38 approved neighborhood plans.

The discussion around plan stewardship often centers on how to assure that ongoing groups will be representative and accountable to their own constituencies and have the capacity to accomplish their roles effectively.

The conclusion of this intense round of neighborhood planning also raises questions about how newly developed neighborhood planning groups fit into preexisting community/neighborhood organizations that already have relationships with the City. During the Neighborhood Planning Process, the Seattle Planning Commission completed thorough reviews of all draft and final plans and made recommendations to the City Council. It consistently identified issues related to neighborhood plan stewardship, particularly related to capacity and clarity of roles and resources. The Planning Commission advocated strongly to the Council that support for stewardship groups would be essential to realizing the many goals of neighborhood plans over time.

The City Council recognized these issues and approved a Statement of Legislative Intent in the 1999 Budget for the Planning Commission to conduct an evaluation of City-initiated and supported citizen participation that was geographically based over the past 10 years. The Planning Commission was charged with providing recommendations to the City regarding how it can provide optimal support for citizen participation, with a specific focus on neighborhood planning stewardship. The Planning Commission was also called on to identify “best practices” that can be used by both citizens and the City in carrying out citizen participation.



## ***Basic Premises Guiding the Citizen Participation Evaluation***

*This report focuses on neighborhoods and how the City can provide optimal support of geographically based programs.*

There are many forms and venues for citizen participation. Not all citizen organizations or efforts are or should be supported by government. In fact, grass roots citizen participation is arguably the most valuable part of the democratic process, allowing citizens to determine their own issues and positions and how they will interact with local government and other community organizations.

This evaluation is built upon the overall belief that effective citizen participation benefits both citizens and government. It recognizes that the knowledge and experience of citizens are valuable resources to the City when developing policies and implementing programs. Citizen participation must be built on good outreach and communication, representation and accountability. When the City initiates and supports citizen participation programs and groups, it must assure that these elements are integral to the process.

## ***Project Description***

The Planning Commission began its work on the Citizen Participation Evaluation by working with the Executive and Council to develop a statement of purpose and scope of work for the project. While there was great interest in many issues around citizen participation, it was determined early on that the scope should be limited to City-initiated and supported citizen participation that is geographically based. It was recognized that this is a starting place for continued conversations about citizen-based participation and the broader topic of civic engagement. However, because of the desire to provide more clear direction for neighborhood plan stewardship, this more limited scope was adopted. Below are the purpose and scope for the project.

### **□ Purpose**

The overall purpose of this evaluation project is to provide guidance to the City (Council and Executive) on effective citizen participation models and techniques that should guide the City in initiating and supporting specific citizen participation efforts.

### **□ Scope**

The scope of the evaluation has several aspects which include:

Identify and evaluate geographically based citizen participation over the past ten years, including participation currently supported by the City. Assess its

effectiveness based on agreed upon criteria and in light of current and future needs within the City and the community. Include technology and communications tools in this assessment.

Identify roles and criteria for geographically based participation. Roles include information sharing; advisory; decision-making. Criteria would be developed to measure achievement of mission and responsibilities, involvement, overall representation, products and outcomes, and accountability. Use these criteria as the framework for evaluating citizen participation.



Work jointly with City Council, DON and SPO in developing and carrying out the evaluation. Involve citizens involved in current citizen participation programs through several forums to get feedback and input on key parameters and findings/recommendations.

Make Recommendations to City Council and Executive regarding effective citizen participation models and processes for the future, including neighborhood planning stewardship and implementation and involvement in ongoing City decision processes.

## ***Methodology: How did we go about preparing this report?***

*The Planning Commission developed a three part approach to the evaluation of citizen participation.*

The Planning Commission developed a three part approach to the evaluation of citizen participation. These included data collection, data analysis, and development of findings and recommendations. The data collection and analysis phase of the project included the following steps:

### **□ City Initiated and Supported Groups**

Information was collected on geographically based citizen participation initiated and supported by the City of Seattle over the past 10 years. Included were neighborhood planning, District Councils/CNC, Block Watch, Crime Prevention Councils, Recreation Center Advisory Committees, and Watershed Advisory Committees. These are all groups that receive some type of support from the City. While not included in the original scope, two other groups were added at the suggestion of the citizen roundtable: the SHA Garden Community Councils and Major Institution Advisory Committees.

Information was collected through interviews with City staff supporting these groups, review of written information and input from citizens involved in the efforts. Information was sought particularly on four aspects: mission and responsibilities (City vs. neighborhood focus; advisory vs. decision-making role), level and type of involvement (representation, diversity), accountability of participating citizens (to citizen constituency, to City), and products and outcomes.

Information was collected on information technology and communications tools that have evolved over the past ten years to expand citizen participation opportunities and effectiveness.

### **□ Research on Other Cities**

Information was also collected from five cities that have active neighborhood based citizen participation efforts that are supported by local government. These include: St. Paul, Minnesota; Portland, Oregon; Vancouver, B.C.; Jacksonville, Florida; and Madison, Wisconsin.

Basic data on their neighborhood programs and citizen participation processes were sought, and follow-up phone interviews were conducted to get responses to the questions being asked in the local surveys.

### **□ Survey Research**

Three types of survey research were carried out: mail survey, phone and personal interviews and focus groups. The mail survey was distributed to over

3000 citizens on various City mailing lists (DCLU, DON, Neighborhood Planning) and was put on the City's web-site. It was also available at City community centers. The survey focused on experiences and opinions regarding City-initiated and supported citizen participation.

Two types of in-person interviews were carried out. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with key City staff and citizens, providing an opportunity to get more detailed information and opinions.

Phone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 100 citizens, drawn from the aforementioned City mailing lists. The phone interviews were similar but more detailed than the mail survey, giving the opportunity to test results from the mail survey and provide more specific comments on some of the questions.

Finally, four focus groups were conducted that targeted City staff and citizens involved in neighborhood planning, the consultants involved in neighborhood planning and members of the City Neighborhood Council.

#### ❑ **Project Process**

While taking the lead in this evaluation project, the Planning Commission worked collaboratively with an interdepartmental staff team (IDT) representing City Council, the Strategic Planning Office(Executive), the Department of Neighborhoods and the Planning Commission to shape and guide the evaluation.

To assure objectivity and quality of the survey research, an outside consultant was hired to interview key informants, hold focus groups, and conduct surveys. Cynthia Baker of Marketworks, Inc. was the principal consultant for these tasks.

A broad group of citizens active in citizen participation processes were involved in the evaluation through a series of three citizen roundtables held at key points during the project. These citizens were given information and opportunity to provide suggestions regarding key areas to focus on in surveys; types of recommendations that would be useful to them and input on the findings and conclusions.

Presentations made to the City Neighborhood Council, City Council, the Community Development Cluster, and the Planning Commission also brought many diverse viewpoints to the evaluation process. Finally, the Planning Commission and City Council will hold a joint public forum on the Final report's recommendations, giving citizens an opportunity to make suggestions regarding specific recommendations to Council before formal action is taken on the report and recommendations.

*The Planning Commission's Neighborhood Planning Committee has provided input and guidance to the project. Several Planning Commission members have been involved since discussions about neighborhood planning stewardship began more than two years ago.*

❑ **What will we do with this report now that it is done?**

While elected officials are the key audience for this report, citizens and City staff will have a strong interest in its proposals. Community members may find many of the recommendations and best practices useful in their grass roots organizations as well as efforts supported by the City. City staff will find guidance about how best to support and effectively use citizen participation.

In roundtable discussions, citizen activists emphasized the need for this report to examine how the City follows through for individuals and groups. As one survey respondent noted, “A few of the City departments haven't really gotten the message of community input yet.” The Planning Commission will urge particular attention to recommendations for strengthening and improving the City’s own processes to assure that citizens’ time and energy is well spent.

This report will be submitted formally to the City Council and the Mayor for their response and action on the recommendations. It will also be distributed to all of the participating groups, to City departments and local libraries. Our intent is that this report, and particularly the recommendations and best practices will form a clear set of actions that can be taken by the City to increase the effectiveness of City-supported citizen participation. We believe that it will also be useful to as well to community groups in strengthening their own organizations.

## ***Description and overview of programs studied***

*“Just about every community in Seattle is organized. They just all haven't been organized as community councils or City-supported groups.”*

**- Jim Diers**  
Director, Department  
of Neighborhoods

### **□ City-supported geographically-based citizen participation programs**

The Planning Commission evaluation found that citizens participate in many City-supported groups, but they also participate in their communities as part of community councils, school organizations, and a variety of religious, social service, political, arts and environmental organizations. In addition, many people do not fit within a traditional framework of institutional community engagement but still are connected to their communities in many informal and important ways. In addition, Seattle supports many highly effective City-wide programs that use citizen participation to create a dialog between the City and its citizens.

The evaluation revealed that there are a variety of ways the City supports citizen participation groups and that every group is unique. The City provides both staff and resources that can range from research, office support, room rentals, mailing, newsletters, and speakers to meeting facilitation, outreach, keeping minutes, and translation services.

The Planning Commission evaluation is focused primarily on six City-supported geographically based citizen participation groups: Block Watch, District Councils and the CNC, Neighborhood Planning groups, Watershed Advisory Committees, Precinct Advisory and Crime Prevention Councils, and Recreation Center Advisory Councils. However, it acknowledges other City supported city-wide citizen participation as well as the over 200 grass-roots community groups that collectively have a major impact on City decision-making.

Two other citizen participation groups were added to the study at the suggestion of the citizens participating in the Planning Commission evaluation roundtables: the SHA Garden Community Resident Councils and Major Institution Master Plan Citizens Advisory Committees. While these two groups do not share all of the characteristics of the other groups the Planning Commission studied – the Major Institution groups are of limited duration and are focused on a single plan and the Garden Community Councils have support not from the City but from the Housing Authority –both provide relevant models of citizen participation processes. Since these two groups were included late in the process, the information about these groups was gathered using only written documents and City staff interviews.

Data was collected on the remaining six groups through in-person and telephone interviews with group members and City staff, review of written material (reports, by-laws, newsletters), and survey research. Groups were evaluated to find out what aspects of the programs work well and might be adapted to benefit other City groups, as well as what programs are less effective. The facts collected about each group include a brief history, current membership, outreach and member retention program information, the roles

and responsibilities of the group, and the mandated and *de facto* relationship of the group to the City. Additional information has been collected, primarily through survey research, on perceptions of the accountability and representation of each group. More complete information on the six groups is provided in the Appendix.

As with any evaluation process, every document and interview reflects a different aspect, in this case, of a set of complex organizations. It is hoped the variety of sources – interviews with citizens members, City staff interviews, survey research and analysis of written records – produces an accurate picture of each of the following citizen participation groups that receives City support.



#### ❑ **Block Watch**

The Seattle Police Department Crime Prevention Section has nine Crime Prevention Coordinators who organize and work with Block Watch groups on crime and quality of life issues. The first Seattle Block Watch program was formed in 1974 in response to residential burglary.

Block Watch has grown to 3800 groups who receive and distribute 83,000 quarterly SPD *Safe and Sound* newsletters to Block Watch members. Police Chief Stamper has a goal of establishing a Block Watch or Block Contact on each of Seattle's 8,900 blocks.

Block Watch groups are lead by citizen volunteers who act as a contact for their block. Groups meet at least once a year and are encouraged also to participate in "Spring Clean", sponsored by SPU and the Conservation Corps, and "Night Out", held each year on the second Tuesday of August. In 1999, over 500 Block Watch groups held "Night Out" events City wide.



#### ❑ **District Councils/City Neighborhood Councils**

District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council were established through City Council Resolution 27709 in 1987. This ordinance also established the Office of Neighborhoods and the Neighborhood Matching Fund. Thirteen District Councils were established as part of the City's commitment to improve mechanisms for communicating with the serving neighborhoods. They were to be made up of representatives from community councils and business organizations, and their boundaries are largely consistent with existing community council boundaries.

In the early years not all district councils met regularly, a point of concern in the Planning Commission's 1994 5 Year Evaluation. Since then, in part through the efforts of the Department of Neighborhoods all thirteen district councils now meet monthly or quarterly. There is continued concern however, that the membership of district councils still draws mostly from community

councils rather than from business organizations or other community groups. Each District Council selects a representative to serve on the City Neighborhood Council (CNC) which meets on a monthly basis.

District Councils are responsible for reviewing and making recommendations to the Citywide Neighborhood Matching Fund Review Committee on applications submitted from their district. They also provide input to the CNC on Street Fund projects. District Councils also are a conduit of information and communication between the City and neighborhoods and between the CNC and community councils.

The CNC is responsible for citizen input to the City Budget process, obtained through an annual City budget conference where City department staff meet with citizens to receive input on capital budget priorities. With the exception of the Small and Simple and other staff-determined NMF grants, the CNC makes recommendations to the Mayor on NMF applications. It does so based on recommendations from its committee, the Citywide Review Team. The CNC is also responsible for making recommendations to SEATRAN on allocations for the Neighborhood Street Fund based on District Council priorities.

Citizens who serve on the District Council and the CNC are selected by their respective organizations. While the City has not established specific rules regarding selection or terms, the CNC and District Councils have written detailed by-laws. Both District Councils and the CNC may have committees in which non-member citizens can participate.

The DON provides staff support to the CNC, scheduling meetings, providing any written materials and keeping minutes. Neighborhood Service Center staff provide limited support to the District Councils, providing meeting space, assisting with outreach, and helping to schedule meetings and events.



#### ❑ **Neighborhood Planning**

The Neighborhood Planning Program constitutes the most ambitious commitment by the City and the community to undertake neighborhood planning. It called for a phenomenal commitment by citizens and City staff not only for planning but for implementing these plans. Neighborhood Planning Committees were established by community members who came forward to initiate neighborhood planning for areas where the Comprehensive Plan had established growth targets. While some people were involved in community councils, business organizations and other established neighborhood organizations, others were new to neighborhood involvement and brought either individual or other interest group perspectives to the process.

The Neighborhood Planning Office (NPO) allowed flexibility in how these groups were formed, but they set specific requirements regarding outreach, inclusiveness and representation in the neighborhood planning groups and their



overall planning process. NPO approval was required at key points during the two-phased planning process to assure an open process and a plan that reflected the diversity of the community.

Most neighborhood planning committees organized with a steering committee and a series of topical or geographic committees that were responsible for developing various aspects of the neighborhood plan. A variety of techniques including workshops, open houses, focus groups and surveys to solicit ideas and opinions were used throughout the planning processes.

As the neighborhood plans neared completion, most neighborhood planning groups tried to address ongoing plan implementation. Stewardship groups are in various stages of organization and action at this point. A few have given the District Council or specific community council responsibility for plan implementation; others are developing coalitions of existing and newly formed organizations and many seek to retain the mix of stakeholders in the stewardship organization. To date, there are no specific requirements for either the composition or operation of neighborhood plan stewardship groups and many are struggling to recruit sufficient citizen volunteers for the work that is to be done.

The City has recently created a neighborhood plan implementation unit in DON, organized around six geographic sectors. A Neighborhood Development Manager for each sector has responsibility for developing a sector plan and coordinating City implementation activities for neighborhood planning areas within their sector. Sector Interdepartmental Teams provide staff from City departments to work with DON and the neighborhoods on plan implementation. Departments are also expected to align their service delivery with these sectors to improve efficiency and accessibility.

Neighborhood Planning groups each have access to \$50,000 in Early Implementation Funds (EIF) and some are using such funds for administrative support or organizational support to their neighborhood plan stewardship activities. However, in 1999 the City Council determined that general administrative funding would no longer be provided to these groups, and that support would be limited to assistance in outreach. (City Council Stewardship Resolutions #30011 and #30094).

#### ❑ **Precinct Advisory Councils**

There are four Precinct Advisory Councils (PACs), one connected to each Police Department Precinct. The PAC system started in 1991 as a Seattle Police Department organization. PAC meetings are announced in local papers and monthly meeting summaries are mailed to hundreds of people.

PACs are evolving to be more citizen-driven, they are currently often used as a forum for Precinct Captains, who chair the meetings and help to set agendas, to



bring issues for discussion. The PAC agenda focuses on specific issues that impact the entire precinct such as budget, staffing, parks, or abandoned cars. All PACs invite all groups in the area to send a representative. One exception is the South Precinct, which elects representatives. The Precinct provides meeting space and secretarial assistance for PACs.

There are five Crime Prevention Councils in the City that receive support through DON grants to the Seattle Neighborhood Group which provides limited support to neighborhoods to form and operate a Crime Prevention Council. These groups often work closely with PACs and are made up of community members, including businesses and residents.



#### ❑ **Recreation Centers Advisory Councils**

The City formalized the relationship between Recreation Center Advisory Councils and the Parks Department in 1976, forming the Associated Recreation Council (ARC) to handle financial transactions and record-keeping for all Advisory Councils. ARC is made up of Advisory Council members and at-large members. ARC has a staff of four to manage finances and payroll, as well as an Executive Director to advocate for the Councils at the City level.

Over 400 citizen volunteers serve on the Advisory Councils of 26 Community Center complexes and 10 special park facilities. With a primary mandate of education, the specific role of the Advisory Councils is to collect fees, budget and expend funds for recreational and educational programs at Parks Department recreation centers. They employ staff in recreational and educational program positions (Advisory Councils hire 1500 permanent and part time staff including teachers). During the Neighborhood Planning process, some Advisory Councils also appointed one of their members to act as a liaison with a neighborhood planning group.

Advisory Councils identify and represent community needs, concerns and interests to the Parks Department, meeting monthly throughout the year. They currently manage more than \$7.7 million. The professional staff coordinator of each site attends meetings and has input into the agenda. Advisory Council by-laws require the use of parliamentary procedure; formal votes need a quorum present. Members serve two or three-year terms and must attend regularly to vote. The minutes of meetings are public documents, are kept for public review, and are required to be posted at the facility. Although this situation has never occurred, if an Advisory Council fails to meet minimum standards, the Parks Superintendent can withdraw formal recognition and a new Council can be formed

Councils sponsor evening recruitment events at community centers and the Parks Department distributes a quarterly ARC newsletter, provides workshops for fundraising, budgeting and reading financial reports, and workshops on

board development, teamwork, and recruitment. The Parks Department shows its appreciation for the hard work of Advisory Council members with an annual volunteer recognition evening and plans to put up photos of Council members up in the lobbies of Community Centers.

#### ❑ **Watershed Management Committees**



Watershed Management Committees work with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) staff to find local solutions to non-point source water pollution. The Committees help develop action plans that focus on restoring habitat and support supporting improved drainage and wastewater treatment through creek restoration programs, community education, outreach, and scientific study.

Watershed Committees began to receive funding following the formation of the Puget Sound Water Quality Authority in 1985, which also wrote a definitive process for community planning in watersheds. SPU assigns project managers for plan development and is developing a new mechanism for on-going plan oversight. SPU and the Parks Department cooperatively support two half-time Watershed Interpretive Specialists who focus on outreach and education as well as implementation and planning. These staff support the committees which meet monthly to develop action plans.

Watershed Committees range in size from less than 10 to 50 or more members and bring together both local residents and experts concerned with water quality. Representatives from local and state agencies, tribes, education, business and non-profit organizations attend meetings. SPU staff manage the Committees' web pages, prepare minutes, send out progress reports, and provide technical and educational material. Committee chairs are elected and set meeting agendas.

Once the Department of Ecology and City Council have approved the plans, committees may meet less frequently. Working groups focused on plan implementation, trail maintenance, education, and salmon habitat continue to meet .

An important mission of Watershed Committees is to keep the people living in watersheds well informed. Watershed Committees send out newsletters, distribute flyers, have web pages, work with school groups, speak at community council meetings, stencil storm drains, and hold a variety of events to raise community awareness.

#### ❑ **Other City-supported groups**

Two additional groups are described although they share only some of the characteristics of the other groups studied – the Major Institution groups are focused on the development and implementation of a specific major

institution's plan and the Garden Community Councils have support not from the City but from the Housing Authority – they provide interesting models of citizen participation.



#### ❑ **Garden Community Resident Community Councils**

The Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) provides technical assistance to four Resident Community Councils in High Point, Rainier Vista, Yesler Terrace, and Holly Park. This assistance includes providing meeting space, oral translation during meetings (at least eight languages are spoken in some garden communities), and mediation services, if needed.

The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development has written guidelines for these Resident Councils that include by-laws, term limits, and election of officers. Each Resident Council is given a page in the monthly resident's newspaper, *TheVoice*, published by Neighborhood House. The SHA provides training in financial management for the treasurer and president of the Community Councils, and also contracts for crime prevention services staff who assist the Council with programming crime prevention measures. Additional funding for Councils comes from federal and state grants.

Councils allocate funds back into the community for projects ranging from intervention specialists for at-risk youth, to clean-up and tree planting events, to computer labs. Councils vary from several members to 50 or more.

#### ❑ **Major Institutions Master Plan Citizens Advisory Committees**



Major Institution Master Plan Citizens Advisory Committees were created as part of the City's Major Institutions Policies, adopted by the City in the early 1980s, and amended in 1996. By the late-1980s, all 13 major medical and higher education institutions (six colleges and seven hospitals) in Seattle had developed master plans with the assistance of Citizens Advisory Committees.

MI Citizens Advisory Committee members are appointed by the City Council for set terms, usually two years. CAC roles, responsibilities, and operating procedures are described in the Director's Rule, 97-01. The committee is to be composed of various representatives reflective of the diversity of the community. The CAC usually has a representative appointed by the institution. The City University Community Advisory Committee (CUCAC) is governed by a separate City-University agreement. It operates as an ongoing group with 12 members selected by community organizations and 4 members appointed by the University.

The Department of Neighborhoods (DON) provides staff who assist in recruiting committee members, coordinate the schedule with the institution and the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use (DCLU), staff meetings,

transcribe and distribute meeting notes. The DON staff also provide technical support and assist in writing correspondence and reports on behalf of the CAC. The DON staff submits formal comments on the major institution's master plan and EIS. The institution makes its consultants available for presentations to the CAC during the planning process, pays for some mailings, and partially pays for City personnel time (principally DCLU staff).

After the master plan has been adopted and approved by the City Council, the CAC transitions or is replaced with Standing Advisory Committee to monitor and oversee the implementation of the adopted plan during its life. This committee must meet at least once a year, but may meet more often. Under the City-University Agreement CUCAC meets monthly.

#### □ **Conclusions**

The establishment and ongoing operation of the City supported citizen participation groups studies reflect the City's commitment to involving citizens in a variety of ways in the operation of City policies and programs. All of these groups are involved in providing citizen ideas, advice and assistance in developing policies, plans and programs, although they vary in their specific roles and responsibilities.

The City has done a good job in developing the original mandate and focus for most of the groups, but actual ongoing operation does not appear to always meet expectations of either the citizens or of staff (e.g. accountability and representation; City level of support and responsiveness). Groups that are funded by larger departments such as utilities seem to have higher levels of resources than others. And input from citizens indicate that even within the same program staffing may vary in amount and nature of support.

Both citizens and City staff believe the intended functions and work of the citizen groups is worth the effort although they see some problems with the citizen participation groups they are involved in. Many of their suggestions for improvements are reflected in the findings and conclusions and recommendations of this report.

## Other Cities' Experiences

The cities used as models of neighborhood-based citizen participation in this evaluation are Jacksonville, Florida; St. Paul, Minnesota; Madison, Wisconsin; Portland, Oregon; and Vancouver, British Columbia. We surveyed scholars, civic leaders, and other knowledgeable individuals for suggestions of mid-sized North American cities that offered examples of effective citizen participation. We also reviewed relevant scholarly literature and conducted a computer-based search for stories of citizen participation successes.

Staff conducted telephone interviews with civic leaders, public officials and citizen activists within each of the cities to identify programs that are working and might have lessons for Seattle. Written documentation of citizen participation programs was also gathered from each city.

The study focused on:

- what resources are dedicated to the support of citizen participation programs (with particular emphasis on how local government supports citizen participation on limited budgets).
- the roles and responsibilities of neighborhood-based citizen participation programs,
- how cities interact with their community groups,
- city expectations of representation and accountability of community groups, and
- innovative programs cities have found to be successful.

*CPACs have clout. They have committees that integrate into city government so that when they are briefed by departments they know what the issues are. Citizens on CPAC are learning how to fit in at the right time. They're asking questions early enough to make changes. They understand the limitations of zoning and land use.*

John Fleming,  
Director, Jacksonville  
Neighborhood  
Services Division

The following are brief descriptions of the cities we studied. More complete information on each city is available in the appendix.

### □ Jacksonville, Florida

The city of Jacksonville covers a very large area and contains over 345 neighborhood groups. In 1994 the City formed six geographically-based Citizen Planning Advisory Committees (CPAC's), in response to Florida State legislation mandating citizen participation in land use and zoning decisions. CPAC's have changed the way Jacksonville operates. "Each CPAC is a citizen group with 40 to 60 members approved by the Mayor, representing a wide spectrum of people: business people, neighborhood people, from high-school dropouts to Ph.D.s," says John Fleming, Director of Jacksonville Neighborhood Services Division.

The Mayor meets quarterly with all CPAC presidents and annually with each CPAC group. They are staffed by the City's Neighborhood Services Division. The public meetings that each CPAC holds monthly have moved beyond land

use and zoning decisions to cover all aspects of city government including capital improvement and transportation projects.

According to Fleming, “CPACs have clout. They’re asking questions early enough to make changes. They understand the limitations of zoning and land use.” Many neighborhood groups have appointed members to CPAC’s. Accountability is maintained through the appointment/reappointment process. Jacksonville has 19 elected City Councilors with 14 elected by district and 5 elected at-large. In the last election, eight of the 14 councilors elected were former CPAC members. The Mayor ran unopposed in the past election.

#### ❑ **Madison, Wisconsin**

The City of Madison has an effective and strong grass-roots system of over 100 neighborhood associations, resident associations, homeowner associations, or neighborhood coalitions/councils. The City’s Department of Planning & Development maintains a data base of neighborhood associations that is updated and distributed monthly to various governmental bodies. Madison City departments have high regard for neighborhood associations: The Parks Commission sends out letters every spring to neighborhood associations to elicit ideas for capital improvements and the Planning Department takes project proposals from developers only after they have presented their proposals to neighborhood associations.

These various organizations do not receive ongoing City support, but can apply for arts and community development funds for community based projects. At least two coalitions of organizations (Planning Councils) do receive some city funds as well as private grants. More such councils are being formed.

Alder people are also increasingly savvy about making sure neighborhood associations are representing their constituents. “We had one meeting among the five of us,’ just doesn’t cut it anymore,” according to Neighborhood Planner Jule Stroick. “Our Alder people are our allies. They play a major role in making sure multi-family areas are heard.” Madison City councilors are elected by district, on a non-partisan basis.

#### ❑ **Portland, Oregon**

Ninety-eight neighborhood associations in Portland participate in local government decision making through seven District Coalitions Boards (DCBs). Neighborhood associations are the bodies who come together to "consider and act upon any of a broad range of issues affecting the livability and quality of their neighborhood." Neighborhood associations generally represent at least 200 households and must be officially recognized by the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI). District Coalition Boards officially contract with the ONI

*The Madison Neighborhood Conference is a one-day city-wide event that draws 400 citizens and includes workshops, speakers, lunch, a networking reception and exhibits. Over 40 workshops are organized into four tracks: Neighborhood Organizing, Working with Local Government, Neighborhood Showcase Sessions, and Hot Topics.*

and are charged with facilitating citizen participation and neighborhood crime prevention services.

DCBs are independent non-profit corporations composed of representatives from the member neighborhood associations. Representation formulae and reporting protocols vary in recognition of differences in communities. DCBs report directly to city administrators and City Council and maintain a district office in a city building.

The ONI is a City bureau, funded by general fund dollars. It promotes citizen participation and communication among the city's neighborhoods, both directly and through neighborhood-based district coalition and area offices. Programs operated by ONI include crime prevention coordination, city information and referral, community outreach and citizen training, and a neighborhood mediation center. Portland city councilors are elected on a city-wide, non-partisan basis.

#### □ **St. Paul, Minnesota**

The St. Paul City Council passed an ordinance to create a citizen participation system 25 years ago. Neighborhoods were organized by the city into 17 planning districts (only one district represented three neighborhoods, the rest contained a single neighborhood). All districts are non-profit corporations composed of representatives from neighborhood associations. Called District Councils or Community Councils, these non-profit corporations are officially recognized and receive city support for office space and staff. The city uses a federal housing formula to determine how much of the \$600,000 allocated to neighborhoods goes to each district, which range in size from 10,000 to 50,000 people. All Councils receive at least \$30,000 annually, and most hire a community organizer and crime prevention coordinator. Many districts also receive funding from foundations.

*There just isn't enough accountability in many District Councils to their own organizations and people in their District. But by now we have a good sense of who we need to talk to. We work around the situation and use the local Chamber or CDCs to get out information.*

Joel Spoonheim, City Planner, St. Paul, MN

The main roles of the District Councils are to review zoning cases, update and maintain the community plan, and do outreach to the larger community on City Council issues. Other duties include providing neighborhood programs ranging from programs for the elderly, youth, crime prevention, housing, and community beautification. Some districts actively engage their communities, using neighborhood Block Clubs for outreach and organizing to renters, youth and other less active citizens. All districts have monthly newsletters, and all have boards, but only some make a great effort to get representatives from business, non-profits, and residential members. Other active organizations in St. Paul neighborhoods include CDCs, Chambers of Commerce, and other grass-roots groups. St. Paul has seven district-representative city council members working in a part-time position.



*Vancouver offers many types of multicultural outreach including staff diversity training, a Newcomers guide to the city (directed to recent immigrants), and translation services for outreach on the Citywide Plan.*

#### ❑ **Vancouver, British Columbia**

Vancouver , B.C. is comprised of 23 neighborhoods and its 10 City council members are elected on an at-large basis . The City of Vancouver does not officially recognize any groups as formal representatives of their neighborhoods and there is no formal structure of neighborhood associations.. Vancouver provides no formal funding for neighborhood groups.

The City has, however, appointed a number of citizen advisory groups on city-wide issues. The City provides funding and staff support for these groups and exerts considerable control over their mission and focus.

In response to the call for more efficient and effective service delivery, Vancouver created Neighborhood Integrated Service Teams and divided the city into 15 areas. NIST multi-departmental service teams, assigned to each of the 15 different areas of the city includes Fire, Police, Health, Planning, Library, Engineering, Permits and Licenses, and Social Planning staff. Over three thousand city workers now work directly in the community out of facilities such as community centers, libraries, fire stations and health units

## Section II: Findings and Conclusions

### □ Overview

This evaluation project has provided rich information regarding how various City-sponsored citizen participation efforts operate, what citizens' perceptions of their role and effectiveness is and what needs to be done to improve these City-supported processes.

The findings and conclusions from this project are based on the synthesis and analysis of data collected from City-sponsored citizen participation groups, survey research conducted for this project and programs in other cities. This section is organized around key topics that were the focus on the overall study, and reflect those elements that are important to the organization and effective use of citizen participation.

### □ General Findings

Opportunities for citizen participation within the City of Seattle have expanded over the past ten years, particularly through the most recent neighborhood planning process, District Councils, Precinct Advisory Committees and Watershed Advisory groups. Many people continue to be involved in a rich mix of grass roots and City supported/sponsored citizen participation efforts. Citizens and staff who work on these groups have a similar goal – to involve citizens in advising the City or helping to shape and carry out City policies and/or programs. The City should take pride in the degree to which it has fostered citizen participation and in the commitment citizens themselves have to engage in making their community a better place to live.

While all City sponsored groups set up some type of structure to guide their organization, they vary significantly in the both the structure (formal by-laws and roles to informal structure) and how they are carried out. There is also variation in how effective these groups are perceived by participants in accomplishing their intended goals. Some citizens and staff believe the groups are very effective, but all have some current or former participants who feel that the group or process was not effective in giving citizens a voice or influence.

The result of increased citizen participation programs and processes is that there are many citizens and City staff who have learned how to work with one another in developing goals and accomplishing tangible actions that improve individual communities and the city as a whole. In the survey research conducted for this study, a majority of respondents believe their involvement has been effective and plan to continue their involvement in City-sponsored as well as community-based organizations.

While all the City-initiated and supported efforts have contributed to increased communication and participation, the recently completed Neighborhood

Planning Project has been the most extensive effort to help citizens plan for the future of their neighborhoods. It trained thousands of citizen planners and brought City departments in closer contact with neighborhoods to identify and accomplish their goals.



In addition, the Department of Neighborhoods has done many things to improve communication between the City and citizens. These have ranged from creating additional Neighborhood Service Centers, sharing a community contacts list, helping to organize new neighborhood organizations, maintaining a Community Calendar and sponsoring Town Hall meetings to coordinating City interdepartmental efforts to address public safety and neighborhood plan implementation issues. They also instituted and manage the Neighborhood Matching Fund which has significantly increased citizen participation at the neighborhood level. This has encouraged citizens to initiate their own self-help projects and has resulted in over 1500 improvement projects in neighborhoods all over the city involving thousands of people..

The overall sense of people participating in this project's surveys, interviews and focus groups is that citizen participation opportunities are more accessible than in the past. Most respondents, as seen in the findings in this section, find satisfaction in being involved in City supported citizen participation and feel they do make a difference.

While the City has greatly improved its relationship and responsiveness to citizens, a number of citizens in surveys and interviews for this project still cite a lack of coordination and follow-through by the City as barriers to citizens participating in City supported planning and participation efforts. Overall this is a less significant issue than in 1987 when the Planning Commission's consultant study that led to the establishment of DON and the Neighborhood Planning and Assistance program. This study confirms that much progress has been made in some departments. However, there are still instances of lack of communication or perceived unnecessary barriers to citizen input/participation that engenders a sense of frustration for citizens who believe their efforts to accomplish neighborhood goals and to solve neighborhood problems are not realized.

## ***Key Elements of Citizen Participation***

This project sought to focus on key elements that comprise effective citizen participation. The findings are organized around these key elements.

### ***Accountability and Representation***

Accountability is one of the most important components of citizen participation. Accountability includes regular communication of both essential information, assuring a process is accessible and that there is responsiveness to input.

Accountability is reflected in people's confidence in the leadership of a group or in City staff. It is reflected in the opportunity for everyone's voice to be heard, in people's willingness to continue their involvement in an organization. Without a sense of accountability, there is little trust in the process and its outcomes.

Community leaders need to be accountable or answerable to the group which they lead; group members need to be accountable to one another and back to the larger community or interests they represent. Likewise, City staff and officials need to be accountable to the policies and programs for which they are responsible and to the citizens from whom they seek advice and assistance

Overall the Planning Commission's research and analysis found that most of the City supported citizen participation groups in Seattle and other cities have general criteria or standards for accountability and representation. However, often there do not appear to be consequences or corrective actions identified to be taken if the standards or criteria are not met.

#### **□ Key findings**

- While expectations about accountability vary among City-sponsored citizen participation groups, most people believe that their group is accountable at least to its members/ member organizations. They also attempt to represent the interests/needs of underrepresented groups as best they can.
- The City addresses accountability of City-sponsored or supported groups mostly on an ad hoc basis. A number of the City-supported citizen groups do not have a regular process for verifying representation and accountability, especially over time. While City staff may encourage actions to increase representation and members may desire it, there are no clear incentives or dedicated resources to meet this expectation and no consequences for not meeting them.

*"The issue of free time is one that drives a lot of non-citizen participation. Whether you are being pushed to be a better parent or being pushed to have two jobs and you're trying to survive...you don't have lot of free time." - Focus Group Participant*

- The Neighborhood Planning project placed the most specific requirements regarding representation and accountability through their funding contracts with neighborhood planning groups. This included specific guidelines and required demonstration of significant outreach, communication, and validation involving a broad cross-section of the community. There were check-ins with NPO where neighborhoods reported on their efforts and how their organization and process resulted in representation and accountability. NPO made available a variety of “tools” as well as ongoing assistance to neighborhoods in identifying stakeholders that needed to be represented.
- In some cases where the group has a clear and specific function, accountability back to groups the members represent is more apparent (For example, Piper’s Creek Watershed group requires members to bring a letter from their organization designating them as the official representative.
- Some survey respondents and focus group participants observed that ongoing groups have difficulty maintaining representation and accountability. While most groups would like to be more representative of the broad interests and stakeholders in their communities, they acknowledge that this often not the case.
- Less than half of the survey respondents felt that their group is representative of the majority opinion in their community. Very few report that their groups take specific actions to encourage participation of groups/interests that are missing, in part due to limited resources.
- While some groups are more successful than others, all groups indicated they have difficulty getting participation in their organizations or events from people of color, renters, those with low-incomes, those who are disabled and recent immigrants from different ethnic groups. Some, however have been successful in recruiting renters to their boards.
- Accountability and representation are hampered when a group or its meetings are dominated by a few individuals or one interest group. This leads to perceived inequities and lack of representation for those whose voices are not being heard. (See Group Dynamics for more on this topic)
- Others believe that the lack of representation and accountability causes the City to be somewhat skeptical of the validity of the outcome, diminishing the group’s effectiveness.
- With a few exceptions, broad based neighborhood groups have difficulty in getting renters to be involved. Some citizens and staff have observed that this may be in part because of the focus on homeowner issues such as land use/zoning as well as the fact that renters are sometimes more mobile and less connected to the neighborhood where they live.

*“We identified the stakeholders through the analysis of who lives in the community and who should be there. Can we find a business owner who wants to come? No! But we know we need to have them. - Interviewee*

- Some survey respondents expressed the view that the City sometimes listens to the squeaky wheel – a vocal few who disagree with the process. They urge elected officials to ask for demonstrated representation and accountability.

*"It's really the people in a pure sense – it's the people who are dues paying members. In a broad sense we feel we should represent the whole community. For example, we don't have any dues paying renters, but I think we still should represent them." - Interviewee*

## **Outreach and Communication**

Outreach and communication are critical components of citizen participation. Outreach is literally “reaching out” to inform and make participation accessible to community members. It may include written communication; use of the media, and person-to-person contact as vehicles for reaching people. Successful citizen participation includes two way communication between the City and citizens and among citizens.

With good outreach and communication, community members have the opportunity to be informed and to participate in local governmental planning and decision-making processes. These elements of citizen participation also help community leaders and representatives act as a conduit between the City and other citizens through their involvement in City-supported citizen participation processes.

Both citizen groups and the City must take responsibility for outreach and communication within the context of City-supported citizen participation processes/programs.



### **□ Key findings**

- While all groups state their goal to be more representative of their community, their outreach efforts are very limited and focused on people attending their meetings and events. Survey respondents identified public meetings (91%), newsletters (78%), individual outreach to friends and neighbors (74%) and volunteer recruitment from the neighborhood (63%) as the most frequently used means of outreach.
- In particular there is very little outreach to non-English speaking people. This was addressed somewhat in neighborhood planning and in SHA's resident organizations through the provision of translators and translated materials for specific community meetings. However, little appears to be done in more active outreach by going to ethnic organizations and events and finding other ways to involve or solicit ideas from non-English speaking people. Limited resources are often a significant factor in this type of more specialized outreach.
- The Neighborhood Planning Project was one of the few citizen participation efforts where the City required specific and significant outreach efforts. The Neighborhood Planning Office provided some technical assistance, including the “Outreach Tool” and some resources were available to fund outreach efforts. These requirements were very challenging; the results took time; and sometimes efforts were limited in their effectiveness.

- The NPO Outreach Tool set provided specific information on outreach to ethnic groups, seniors, persons with disabilities, social services agencies, etc. However, there were significant complaints in general that the “Toolkit” was too large and cumbersome to be useful (and used) by many neighborhood planning groups.

*“There’s no one (method) that stands out. Diversity is the key to outreach. We have to do it all (media, email, posters)...that’s the lesson we learned.” - Interviewee*

- City-supported groups see good communication to the community as important and most tend to use relatively few and largely traditional methods of communication.
- Survey respondents indicated that they most frequently find out about upcoming events and issues that affect their neighborhood from community-based newsletters (57%), daily newspapers (54%) and City newsletters (49%).
- District Councils were set up in part to provide improved communication between the City and neighborhood groups and among those groups. This has been beneficial to the member groups, but since the number of groups included in communications varies fairly significantly among the 13 District Councils, the overall breadth of communication among organizations within the community varies accordingly.
- A few groups whose roles include public education use innovative ways to communicate with and educate the public. For example watershed councils stencil drains, post streams and distribute flyers throughout the watershed. Several neighborhood planning groups sponsored neighborhood festivities to bring people together to involve them in the planning process. Block watch groups are also encouraged to hold an annual neighborhood block party to celebrate neighborhood safety.
- Survey respondents identified communication between community organizations and within the neighborhood as important to making citizen participation more meaningful. However, there seem to be many gaps in communication among organizations as well as between community organizations and the City (with its multiple components).





## Group Dynamics and Group Effectiveness

The original scope of work for this project did not address group dynamics, but it soon became clear that this issue factored into people's perceptions of the effectiveness of citizen participation, as well as their satisfaction and willingness to participate. How a group operates has an important impact on both the effectiveness of the group and individual members' likelihood for continued participation.

Group dynamics refer to how groups operate and includes formal and informal procedures and rules. It encompasses how people relate to differences and controversy, how new people are incorporated into the organizations, how decisions are made, how people treat one another. Group dynamics play an important role in people's willingness to participate in organizations, whether City-supported or not. It is critical that City-supported citizen participation programs and processes emulate the highest values regarding inclusiveness, respect and good leadership.

### □ Key findings

- A sense of meaningfulness is critical to people's attitudes and willingness to participate. People who plan to stay involved in public participation get satisfaction from being informed about what is happening in the community, working with others, seeing projects completed and meeting neighbors.
- An overwhelming 80% of survey respondents believe their group's involvement had a meaningful impact on their neighborhood or the community as a whole.
- Over 25% rated the effectiveness of their own involvement highly; only 6% rated it low.
- People draw meaning from their involvement for a variety of reasons, especially as a way to see results, a way for people to work together for the community, to make a difference, a way to meet other people, and to be listened to by the City/departments .
- Survey respondents reported that group dynamics\* (52%) and personal/life conflicts major reasons for not staying involved in local government issues(50%). Burnout (8%)and cynicism (16%) are also significant reasons people gave for not staying involved.
- People tend not to stay involved, either because their issue is addressed, they can't sustain the time commitment, or they get discouraged with lack of success in achieving their goals.

*"I learned a lot about City government and learned about the impact of one person again. And I got to know my neighbors and really develop a sense of belonging to the community." - Interviewee*

*"Involvement in neighborhood planning and district council has been empowering. It has opened my eyes to local resources that individuals can access. And it has given me confidence that neighborhoods can make a difference in their own futures."- Survey respondent*

*"The ability to select the right agenda and the ability to communicate effectively with appropriate City staff and officials." - Interviewee (on what is important to group effectiveness)*

- A number of people cited “group dominated by a few individuals or special interests” as what they meant by group dynamics. In every area of the survey research, people stated that poorly managed meetings (and organizations), particularly those where a few people dominate, tend to drive others away from participating.
- Survey respondents identified a need for more effective leadership to make participation worthwhile for people. This also came up in focus groups, in-depth interviews, and the citizen roundtables. It reflects the importance of training volunteers to be able to use their time and energy effectively.

## ***City Responsibilities and Defining Citizens' Roles***

The City itself plays an important role in assuring that citizen participation programs and processes make the best use of citizen's time and talents. City support is an important ingredient to many groups. It gives them the capacity to reach out to many people, to plan, to build support for projects, and to engage people in hands-on activities.

Citizens raised a number of suggestions regarding how to make citizens involvement more meaningful. Many of these relate to the City's role in building and maintaining a sense of trust between citizens and local government. City support often engenders a feeling of increased effectiveness for citizen participation groups.

### **□ Key findings**

- Citizens involved in City-supported participation programs generally believe they are more effective in influencing the outcome of issues than through involvement in other types of groups.
- City support gives citizen participation groups capacity to reach out to many people, to plan and build support for projects and to engage people in hands-on activities.
- Participants in City-supported groups find the City fairly responsive and are evenly divided in whether they receive adequate resources for their work.
- However, some citizens fault the City for inefficiencies, particularly poor communication and coordination, and sometimes perceive resistance or unwillingness to respond to citizen initiatives.
- Citizens emphasize the importance of the City's role in building and maintaining a sense of trust between citizens and local government.
- Survey respondents identified a number of ways that citizen participation could be made more meaningful. This included improved communication (27%) (City listening; communication to and within the neighborhood), seeing clear results from the City for their efforts (20%), getting more people involved (20%) including those who are hard to reach, help in effective group and meeting management (12%), and improved internal City coordination and efficiency of their processes (9%).

*"The City has too many uncoordinated citizen involvement efforts that aren't going anywhere." - Focus Group Participant*

*"Processes are so long. I don't know how you shorten those time frames....Better communication, shorter process time, less of 'us versus them', however you do that. Not like 'we're the power and you're not' " - Interviewee*

## Section III: Recommendations

The overall results of this study reflect well on the efforts the City has made in recent years to be more open and intentional about involving citizens in advising and shaping City decisions. It has been particularly useful in identifying what is working and ways to improve how City-initiated and supported citizen participation can be more effective.

The recommendations below focus on ways to strengthen the City's role in making effective use of citizen's time and talents and in ensuring that citizen participation programs and processes are accessible and easily understood by a broad spectrum of community members.

These recommendations focus on clarifying and strengthening the role of City initiated and supported citizen groups to perform agreed upon tasks, such as advising or assisting while meeting expectations of accountability to the communities they represent and to the City.

Effective citizen participation requires resources. Citizen volunteers contribute time and energy as well as much of the extra work to recruit members and communicate in a variety of ways with others in their community and the City. The City invests a combination of staff time and funds for mailings and meeting locations comprise the minimum support that the City should assure.

While it is beyond the scope of this report to identify funding sources, we recognize the importance of identifying responsibilities where possible. The Department of Neighborhoods is the most logical department to take the lead for a number of recommendations regarding ways to strengthen the City's capacity and support for citizen participation. But the City should view citizen participation as a commitment by all departments. If the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) is charged with implementing many of these recommendations, it will require the addition of dedicated staff to focus on carrying out specific activities.

Finally the recommendations made here should be considered as critical investments to developing capacity among citizens and City staff so they can work effectively together in both formal and informal participation processes.

## **OBJECTIVE A:**

***Clearly establish and carry out the City's Expectations for City Initiated and supported Groups, ensuring that citizen groups receive fair and consistent treatment.***

### **□ Priority Recommendations**

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#### **A1. Establish and implement clear guidelines for all City initiated and supported citizen participation groups and processes.**

Develop and implement guidelines regarding expectations for City-supported citizen participation groups that address, representation, accountability communication, and resources. Use guidelines for all City supported citizen participation groups and efforts.

#### **A2. Institute oversight and monitoring processes for all City-initiated groups to assure that expectations are met, including specific steps to be taken when such expectations are not being met.**

- Define membership qualifications, selection process, terms of service and standards/expectations regarding representation of specific interests (e.g. expectations to report back to and obtaining input from constituencies).
- Clearly define citizen and staff roles and responsibilities. Identify the support that will be provided to accomplish these.
- Establish and carry out annual monitoring to assure that expectations are being met.
- Define steps/process to be taken if these expectations are not being met to bring groups into compliance.
- Care should be taken that City oversight does not discourage or place barriers to participation by these groups.

#### **Sample Guidelines:\***

1. Purpose, duration and outcome of group
2. Roles and responsibilities for citizens and staff
3. Job descriptions for members and officers
4. Meeting schedules
5. Process for reaching consensus
6. Process for recruiting
7. Orientation process
8. Keeping minutes and documenting decisions
9. Informing City, membership and broader community of decisions and upcoming events

\* Based on Handbook for Recreation Advisory Councils and the Associated Recreation Council Guidelines

#### **A3. Ensure that roles are tied to expectations and support among City-initiated and supported citizen participation groups. Assure consistency across departments in their efforts.**

Groups that have more responsibility (advise on or make funding decisions) should meet greater accountability standards than those whose roles have less formal impact on City decisions. Departments should be consistent with one another in their approach to roles/responsibilities and accountability expectations.

*"Provide written invitations outlining in detail the scope of the citizen participation and the intended commitment of time. Produce a clearer pattern of results for efforts given." - Interviewee*

## **OBJECTIVE B:**

### **Establish Clear Expectations and Capacity to Support City Initiated Citizen Advisory Groups and Processes**

#### **□ Priority Recommendations**

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#### **B1. Define clear roles and responsibilities for City officials and staff in City supported citizen participation.**

Build on the Guidelines developed for Neighborhood Plan Stewardship which defines specific City roles in plan stewardship (NPO and Council documents) include roles of staff in supporting-citizen participation undertaken by departments.

*"To get volunteers to be an effective source of input, you have to have the structure to take that input and act on it." - Interviewee*

#### **B2. Ensure that City departments, as part of their performance and accountability measures, include specific goals, actions and results for citizen participation.**

Such goals, activities and results should be integrated into regular departmental operations, with a specific focus on neighborhood plan implementation and other citizen participation processes. A standard checklist should include measurable improvement in the quality of citizen input; responsiveness to citizen concerns/ideas, timely implementation of projects.

*"A whole series of how to make the City not perceived as bureaucratic and hard to deal with.....They (staff) have to be sensitive to consistency and incorporate that element into performance reviews of people. Make them accountable. It's the people." – Interviewee*

#### **B3. Establish a Citywide goal that all staff who work with citizens demonstrate appropriate skills and competency in working effectively with citizens and in carrying out citizen participation processes. Implement through staff training.**

Train City staff involved with citizen participation to build competencies in communications, running effective meetings, and group process. Dedicate funding, possibly through contributions from departments whose staff are receiving the training; consider carrying out through the ESD City Performance Group or through the Department of Neighborhoods training programs.

*The City is making good headway in developing the GARMS as a tool for measuring accomplishment of goals. Citizen participation should be part of every department's goals, including description of where and how citizens are involved; how the results will be measured applying standards contained in these recommendations.*

**B4. Increase efficiencies of citizen participation processes where appropriate. Support DON's initiative to consolidate citizen participation in the Cumulative Reserve Fund (CRF) and major maintenance(MM) fund allocation processes.**

*"Find new ways for citizens who don't have much free time to participate such as through short-term, limited projects or tasks." - Consultant suggestion*

Encourage formal coordination among departments. Examine City processes to identify and eliminate redundancies, unnecessary steps and barriers to seeking and responding to citizen priorities and needs. Consider combining processes and schedules where appropriate, consolidating communication and outreach efforts and providing consistent expectations and resources across departments.

**B4a. Explore new models for carrying out City-sponsored citizen participation, including organizing it along geographic lines rather than departmentally. Keep focus on making citizen participation accessible and effective for citizens in participating in local government processes.**

**B5. Adopt a City of Seattle Commitment to Citizen Involvement.\***

This is an opportunity for the City to celebrate the contributions and value of citizen participation. It should clearly communicate the City's commitment to citizen involvement in general and to working toward partnerships with citizens in addressing the city's needs.

*\* Base on Resolution 25387, 1976 Resolution on Citizen Participation*

**City commitment to Citizen involvement**

Excerpts from the Portland Guiding Principles of Citizen Involvement

1. *Respect and encourage citizen participation by ensuring that City communications and processes are clear and understandable.*
2. *Reach out to all our communities to encourage participation that reflects Portland's rich diversity.*
3. *Seek early involvement of citizens in development of plans,, projects, and policies..*
4. *Consider and respond to citizen input in a timely manner, respecting all perspectives and insights.*
5. *Commit to coordinate City bureau's outreach and involvement activities to make the best use of citizens' time and efforts.*
6. *Evaluate and report on the effectiveness of City outreach efforts to achieve the quality of City/citizen collaboration critical to good governance.*
7. *Promote on-going education of citizens in neighborhood and community groups, and City officials and staff in community organizing, networking, and collaboration.*

## **OBJECTIVE C:**

### ***Provide City Resources for City Supported Citizen Participation Bodies and Processes to ensure that Expectations Placed on Both Citizens and Staff can be met.***

Citizens serving on City supported groups contribute their time and energy to help the City carry out many activities from developing policies to implementing specific projects. Adequate support should be provided to any City supported citizen participation effort to guarantee the ability of each group to carry out its expected tasks and functions, including involving “hard to reach” groups.

#### **□ Priority Recommendations**

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##### **C1. Provide adequate resources to each City-supported citizen participation process to ensure it will meet the expectations placed on both citizens and City staff.**

Resources should be provided for outreach, communications, meeting materials and documentation. The City should ensure consistent levels of support to groups that have the same types of functions and responsibilities.

Basic element of support for City supported citizen groups:

- Assistance or resources for outreach and communication
- Space for meetings and special events
- Consistent staff contact
- Timely information needed to understand and accomplish tasks

##### **C2. Fully fund the DON Leadership Program as an ongoing program. Include a focus on building leadership capacity among citizens in or considering leadership roles as well as members of underrepresented groups.**

Make special efforts to recruit people of color, renters and other underrepresented groups to participate in this training. Track results of this training to measure how City-supported as well as other citizen participation efforts are strengthened and improved with better trained citizens

“Graduates” of this program should be expected to share their knowledge and expertise with their organizations as well as the larger community.

Topics to include in the leadership training:

- Outreach and communications with hard-to-reach populations;
- How to conduct effective meetings
- Creating a respectful environment for citizen participation;
- Understanding how to work with City/other public agencies;
- Managing projects including budget/grant management



**C3. Institute a biennial Community Congress as an opportunity and regular mechanism for sharing accomplishments and challenges and addressing issues encountered in citizen/City working relationships.**

Allocate adequate resources to undertake this event, exploring. Funding sponsors and assistance from local universities, public interest organizations and local/national foundations. Consider sponsorship by CNC, Neighborhood Stewardship Groups and Planning Commission.

What is a Community Congress?

- Usually an annual event to bring citizens together to discuss common issues of concern, learn technical and organizational skills, interact with city staff and elected officials, and solidify important local networks.
- Madison, WI sponsors an annual one-day congress that includes workshops, speakers, lunch, a networking reception and exhibits.
- The City of Seattle held a Neighborhood Planning Conference in 1994 which included various workshops as well as general sessions.

## **OBJECTIVE D:**

***Provide Ongoing City Support for Neighborhood Planning Stewardship Efforts, ensuring that they have capacity necessary to carry out their roles in implementing neighborhood plans.***

As part of this evaluation project, the City Council and Department of Neighborhoods asked the Planning Commission to make specific recommendations regarding the Neighborhood Plan Stewardship process. These build on the DON brochure (Describing expectations of neighborhood stewards and the City), a Planning Commission Guide for Neighborhood Planning Stewardship, and the City Council's City Stewardship memo describing City stewardship roles and responsibilities. The recommendations put forth here build on these efforts.

The Planning Commission is aware that many stewardship efforts have not developed a clear group or process for the community to steward the plan vision and priorities. Stewardship is more than monitoring projects. It is an important way to provide continuity and continued commitment to the overall vision over time. Therefore these recommendations focus on a commitment to build and maintain capacity within these neighborhoods to steward the vision of their plans as well as monitor and assist in implementing specific projects.

Effective stewardship is also tied to sufficient resources for implementing plan recommendations. The Planning Commission strongly urges the City to thoroughly explore ways to provide adequate funds to implement neighborhood plans. This is a critical measure of the City's true commitment to involving citizens in planning for their neighborhood's future and in responding to both short and long term priorities in these plans.

Neighborhood Planning Stewardship will build on foundations of the neighborhood planning process, especially its significant efforts and success in bringing new people into the planning process. The specific expectations for neighborhood planning groups regarding outreach, involvement of all stakeholders and validation within the community of the plan's goals and recommendations continue to be important elements in an effective stewardship group and in the plan implementation process.

## □ Priority Recommendations

### **D1. Complete development and implement guidelines for Neighborhood Planning Stewardship that clearly define roles and responsibilities for stewardship efforts and for the City.**

Build on the NP Stewardship Resolution and the NPO process to develop specific guidelines for Neighborhood Planning stewardship. Focus on specific guidelines and techniques for ongoing outreach, communication to the broader community, clear methods of assuring openness, representation, and accountability (including validating decisions). Institute monitoring/assessment by DON's Neighborhood Development Managers at least annually to certify that groups are adhering to these guidelines.

Guidelines for Stewardship Roles and Responsibilities:

- Outreach
- Membership & representation
- Communication and Feedback
- Monitoring Plan Implementation

### **D2. Allocate adequate resources to DON to support Neighborhood Planning Stewardship efforts in carrying out their stewardship roles and responsibilities.**

Allocate funds to DON Neighborhood Development Managers to be used to support NP stewardship groups. Funds would cover administrative needs (mailings for regular stewardship communication and periodic community mailings; space for meetings; copying of materials), technical assistance in capacity building and outreach. Level of support may differ depending upon the capacity in the neighborhood.

Provide information to all NP stewardship groups regarding existing resources such as the Outreach Fund and Small Starts Fund and use of NMF for community organizing. DON should also consider augmenting its resources to further focus on outreach to renters, building on the model used in Bellevue, WA.

Bellevue Multifamily Outreach Program

*A program that targets outreach to immigrant populations and other apartment dwellers. Conducted surveys to identify. Gives training sessions to property owners who present workshops to tenants. Include fire prevention, recycling, emergency preparation, introduction to City services and programs, with a specific focus on the Neighborhood Enhancement Program (like Seattle's NMF), and conflict resolution.*

### **D3. Establish a Neighborhood Planning Stewardship Advisory Group to provide ongoing advice to the City in neighborhood plan implementation.**

Support DON's efforts to establish and staff an ongoing advisory group that addresses City and community issues related to effective stewardship and implementation of neighborhood plans. This group should be composed of neighborhood plan stewardship representatives. Consider having this group host periodic forums of

all stewardship groups to share ideas and experiences and to provide input to the City on implementation issues.

**D4. Ensure that Neighborhood Matching Fund continues to be a significant funding source for Neighborhood Plan implementation projects.**

(DON) Work with District Councils and Neighborhood Plan Stewardship efforts to ensure that the NMF process and allocation decisions reflect the City's commitment to implementing projects in areas accommodating much of the city's growth, while assuring that initiatives from other neighborhoods continue to have access to this important source of funds for neighborhood generated ideas.

Ensure that District Council NMF citizen review committees include members who represent neighborhood plan stewardship efforts as well as people from other areas of the district Direct NMF staff and Neighborhood Development Managers to assure representation of underrepresented interests in these review processes

## **OBJECTIVE E:**

### **Clarify and Improve District Council/CNC and Neighborhood Planning Stewardship Roles and Relationships**

The roles and relationships between District Councils and Neighborhood Planning Stewardship groups have surfaced as an issue that requires careful attention. While this was not a major focus of this evaluation, enough has been learned through the surveys and data collection to include discussion and several recommendations.

District Councils and Neighborhood Planning groups play different roles, although in some areas where boundaries are contiguous these two groups have merged to carry out both sets of functions.

District Councils vary in the breadth of membership and the extent to which they involve non-members in activities, including the NMF review process. While some seek membership from a broad spectrum of organizations and involve people beyond the District Council from the community in NMF, others have more limited involvement of community councils/local business organizations. Some also do not have specific people designated for NMF review, but include whoever shows up for the NMF review session as the review committee.

District Councils are largely made up of community councils (comprised mostly of , single family homeowners), and local business organizations. As a result, they focus primarily on issues that most directly affect these constituencies, especially land use and transportation. These are legitimate and important interests in our community and it is appropriate to ensure that they have a clear voice in policy and budget processes.

One key goal of Neighborhood Planning was to be inclusive and the broad outreach resulted in many new people coming to the table representing a wide variety of interests. Consequently, many neighborhood plans have addressed a broad range of issues -- affordable housing, open space, human services, public safety and environmental issues as well as land use and transportation issues.

The intent of these recommendations is to more clearly define the relationships among the District Councils/City Neighborhood Council and Neighborhood Plan stewardship efforts and to take advantage of the City's Sector approach to coordinate and integrate where appropriate the work of these different entities.

*The Department of Neighborhoods provides a good model for the City's efforts to coordinate its activities and services along the broad geographic sectors. All of their programs have stayed intact, but are organized in sector teams to assure programmatic and geographic coordination. Neighborhood Service Center (NSC) managers still have responsibility for their districts, but communicate and coordinate with the other NSC's in their sector. Likewise the NMF staff are assigned to sectors so that they can look at all NMF projects within a sector and encourage joint efforts and coordination among groups and projects where appropriate.*

*The Planning Commission believes that City should carry out a similar approach with District Councils and Neighborhood Plan Stewardship groups. These groups continue to carry out their current roles, but also coordinate on a sector level on cross cutting issues and citywide processes. This will help to assure that both District Councils and Neighborhood Planning Stewardship groups benefit from the City's sector structure and that they take advantage of opportunities to work together on shared issues.*

## □ **Priority Recommendations**

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### **E1. Recognize and confirm the separate and complementary roles of Neighborhood Plan stewardship efforts and District**

**E1a. Validate the Neighborhood Planning Stewardship roles:** to implement neighborhood plans for designated neighborhood planning areas, maintain an inclusive process and work collaboratively with the City and other community organizations.

**E1b. Validate the District Councils' roles to:** act as a forum for communicating among neighborhood organizations and with the City and in providing input to specific funding programs (Neighborhood Matching Fund and Major Maintenance Fund). Encourage District Councils to expand their membership (use Ballard as a model) to include a broader spectrum of organizations.

**E2. Develop specific goals for outreach and representation, and institute clear accountability measures for District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council related to specific advisory/decision making functions. Include a process for monitoring and assuring these goals are met.**

**E3. Encourage District Councils and Neighborhood Plan Stewardship groups to participate in each other's organizations. At a minimum they should be appoint a representative to one another's organizations.**

**E4. Use the proposed Neighborhood Planning Stewardship Advisory Committee to host periodic forums for the City Neighborhood Council and Neighborhood Planning Stewardship representatives to meet with City officials on topics of mutual interest.**

## Other Recommendations

### **1. Create a “Guide to Citizen Participation” to inform and orient citizens to opportunities for citizen participation in City of Seattle programs and decision-making processes.**

Design this tool to provide citizens with clear information on opportunities to participate in City processes and program, including contact persons for more information. Include City supported citizen participation processes such as capital budget, annual budget, and annual Comprehensive Plan amendment as well as more geographically based efforts.

Coordinate this interdepartmental effort through DON.  
Disseminate information broadly through libraries, community centers, on the WEB, and as a newspaper insert.

Guide to Citizen Participation

*Key City departmental contacts*  
*Glossary of City processes, programs, departments*  
*Regular opportunities for citizen involvement*  
*Short-term opportunities for participation*  
*Web site with information on City and other related organizations processes where citizen input is sought*

### **2. Ensure that each Department assigns a specific staff person to provide support to citizen advisory groups they initiate and operate and for City sponsored citizen participation processes in which they participate.**

These staff should act as liaisons between citizens/citizen groups and others in the City, but may not provide actual staff support. Compile and maintain a directory of contact persons.

### **3. Continue to develop and provide access to City communications tools, and technical assistance in organizing effective outreach and communication to all community members**

This function already occurs to some extent through DON training workshops for community members. It should be expanded to include tools and techniques and, where appropriate, assistance in reaching “hard to reach” groups and interests in the community.

### **4. Continue to develop and make available City Web sites that contain information and opportunities for input on specific City planning/decision making processes where citizen participation is sought.**

Access to this form of communication and interaction should be available (and its use encouraged) at libraries, community centers and other public facilities such as schools. (ESD lead and funding).

**5. Explore a mentoring program that links active, successful stewardship groups with those having difficulties.**

Take advantage of the experience and expertise within neighborhood planning groups to help other neighborhood planning areas that need help in reinvigorating their stewardship effort and organizing for implementation.

*"I think there needs to be more direct hotlines, more television ads and a directory for the government access channel." - Interviewee*

**6. Adopt and implement standardized methods for maintaining mailing lists for sectors that can be used by neighborhood planning stewardship groups and City departments**

Organize by sector, neighborhood planning areas and district council areas; include all known organizations (not just community councils and business organizations; update on a regular basis; and make available through the web.

*Master Gardener Program:*

*-Program participants receive extensive training from experts who volunteer their time. In turn, participants donate a specific number of hours upon completion of their training as "master gardeners" at community events and locations. This fosters an ever growing pool of trained volunteers who help others.*

**7. Carry out a biennial "Review and Validation" of Sector Implementation Plans, as proposed in the City's Stewardship "Star" document.**

DON will report to City Council on accomplishments and community and City validation for the next tier of priorities and projects for each sector annually.

**8. Consider adding a sector level review for certain NMF projects.**

Consider adding a Sector level review for certain projects that cross neighborhood or district boundaries and/or that have benefits or impacts on a broad area within the sector.. This should be coordinated by the NMF staff assigned to the sector and include representatives from all District level review teams within the sector.

**9. Continue to hold periodic Sector Forums that bring together City-supported citizen groups and other community groups and interests.**



DON should support these forums which could be initiated by citizen interest with the purpose of sharing information about accomplishments, ideas and issues, and exploring potential collaboration. These could be done as an open house in a community facility; information sharing on the Web as well as a scheduled event.

**10. Encourage City departments to coordinate citizen participation efforts through Neighborhood Development Managers .**

Take advantage of the Sector IDT's to share information and carry out more coordinated citizen participation efforts where departments have issues or programs that are either related to one another or affect the same area. However, assure that such efforts do not compromise citizen access or input.







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**Marty Curry**, Director  
Seattle Planning Commission

**Tom Wales**, Chair  
Seattle Planning Commission

## **REPORT RESEARCH AND COMPILATION**

**Cynthia Baker**, consultant  
Market Works

**Cathy Tuttle**, project staff  
Seattle Planning Commission

## **REPORT PUBLICATION**

**Susanne Friedman**, graphic design and layout  
Seattle Planning Commission

**SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION 206.684.0433**